

November 8, 2002
AGENDA ITEM #12

To: Delta Protection Commission

From: Margit Aramburu, Executive Director

Subject: Briefing on Natural Resources Conservation Service's Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)
(For Commission Information Only)

BACKGROUND:

WRP is a voluntary program that provides an opportunity for landowners to receive financial incentives to restore wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal land from agriculture. The landowner may file an application for a conservation easement or a cost-share restoration agreement with USDA to restore and protect wetlands. Participants voluntarily limit future use of the land, but retain private ownership.

The WRP is reauthorized through 2007 in the 2002 Farm Bill. Funding comes from the Commodity Credit Corporation.

PROGRAM OPTIONS:

The conservation easements can be 30-year easements, or permanent easements.

In the Restoration Cost-Share Agreements, landowners re-establish degraded or lost wetland habitat for a minimum of ten years. USDA pays 75% of the cost of restoration.

APPLICATION CRITERIA:

Landowner must have owned the land for at least 12 months unless the land was inherited, the landowner exercised the landowner's right of redemption after foreclosure, or the landowner can prove the land was not obtained for the purpose of enrolling it in the program.

The land must be restorable and suitable for wildlife benefits.

SELECTION CRITERIA:

Applications are ranked and selected at the State level, with State criteria set within the broad national guidelines.

LAND USES UNDER THE WRP PROGRAM:

Land under an easement can be used for hunting, fishing, and other "undeveloped recreational" activities. Landowner can ask for permission to cut hay or graze livestock and may be allowed if compatible with protection and enhancement of the wetland.

CONSISTENCY WITH CALFED:

The WRP is a "Category B Program" under CALFED. This means the program is related to and overlaps with CALFED objectives and geographic area, but does not support the CALFED Record of Decision activities or objectives. Managers of Category B programs are to coordinate and share information with other CALFED agencies and the CALFED Policy Group in order to increase efficiency and avoid duplication. Category B Programs are not subject to any CALFED requirements.

EASEMENTS IN THE DELTA:

Statewide, during the period 1992 through 2001, NRCS has purchased permanent easements on 49,077 acres, 30-year easements on 6,433 acres, and 10-year restoration easements on 5,533 acres.

In the Delta, during the period 1992-2001, NRCS has purchased permanent easements on 2,324 acres (4.7%), 30-year easements on 800 acres (12.4%), and 10-year restoration easements on 290 acres (5.2%).

Note: Several additional easements totaling up to 3,922 acres may be purchased in 2002; those purchases are not yet final.

Conservation Easements Purchased in the Delta: 1992-2002

1992: Laurel G Ranch, Yolo Bypass, Yolo County (permanent)	366 acres
1994: L&L Farms, Medford Island, San Joaquin County (permanent)	232 acres
1998: M. Frelier, Holland Tract, Contra Costa County (permanent)	493 acres
L&L Farms, Medford Island, San Joaquin County (permanent)	512 acres
Liberty Farms, Solano County (permanent)	563 acres
River Island, Tyler Island (30-year easement)	800 acres
1999: Munsey/Eikmeyer, Yolo Bypass, Yolo County (10--year restoration agreement)	30 acres
Hallmark Services, Yolo Bypass, Yolo County (10-year restoration agreement)	160 acres
2000: Los Rios Putah Creek, Yolo County (permanent)	158 acres
2001: R. Williams, Solano County (10-year restoration agreement)	100 acres
2002: PROPOSED ONLY	
Mandeville Island, San Joaquin County (permanent)	3,067 acres
Liberty Farms, Solano County (permanent)	565 acres
Spaletta & Reynolds, San Joaquin (permanent)	170 acres
L&L Farms, Medford Island, San Joaquin County (permanent)	120 acres